

## COMPONENT 4: SELECTION OF COHERENT IMPROVEMENT STRATEGIES

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### **4.A. A description that demonstrates how the improvement strategies were selected and will lead to the SiMR.**

With support from NERRC to guide our process, Maine DOE held meetings with stakeholders to review data analysis, review infrastructure analysis, identify the SiMR, explore root causes, and identify coherent improvement strategies to help students with disabilities increase proficiency in math (see Appendix A, Label 4, page 33). Conversations with stakeholders about root causes revealed multiple possibilities for providing support. Maine has chosen strategies and tools that align with other state school improvement efforts and are supported by a coaching model to develop, monitor and sustain appropriate, evidence-based interventions to school districts to address increased proficiency in math for students with disabilities.

Building on Maine's School Improvement Team model (which consists of experienced educators and administrators who serve as coaches to focus and priority schools), SSIP coaches will provide differentiated support to schools based on their level of need defined by various factors including discrepancy in proficiency. Currently School Improvement coaches support identified and participating schools in the development and implementation of an improvement plan using the Indistar System of research-based indicators of effective practice. Indistar is customizable and Maine's School Improvement Team version has been termed Dirigo Star. Already, goals 2 and 3 of the State Personnel Development Grant (SPDG) address processes supporting programming in the least restrictive environment, and development of standards based IEPs. Both of these activities build capacity with educational teams in identified and participating districts in LRE decision making practices and access to all standards for all students. These teams become the regional leaders and receive coaching in the development of their practice, including support of the requesting SAUs in their region.

Utilizing Dirigo Star or a modified version, SSIP coaches will support identified schools in the application of a self-assessment and development and training of an implementation team. Coaches will support schools in using and applying data in their decisions regarding root causes to decreased proficiency, in the development of an evidence-based action plan to improve their results, and accessing resources. This support will be provided on an ongoing basis and will adjust based on the school's outcomes. The SSIP workgroup will be meeting in April with Maine's School Improvement Team Leads to inform the process of individualizing and utilizing Dirigo Star, and learn from their implementation efforts on the most effective use of coaches to support improvement efforts.

We selected our improvement strategy based on existing state practices that have been found to support school improvement efforts and the use of Dirigo Star as a tool that was built on a foundation of research based practice resources to support site based improvement planning. Tools in and of themselves are no guarantee to successful implementation of improved practice. We will also utilize SSIP coaches to provide sustained and ongoing support to improve school organization and instructional practices. The school-based coaches will have a shared professional development experience prior to connecting with identified schools to create consistency across schools with delivery of support at each school. Coaches will facilitate regular meetings with the school based leadership team including an administrator, regular educators and special educators to analyze data and strategize plans. Professional development will include a focus on effective mathematics instructional practices and opportunities to engage in collaboration with special educators and general educators in developing an effective inclusionary model supporting a least restrictive environment for students with disabilities (Morse 2009).

When discussing local education agencies, Maine DOE and this SSIP refer to school districts as school administrative units (SAUs).

### **4.B. A description that demonstrates how the improvement strategies are sound, logical, and aligned.**

The primary strategies Maine proposes to use to increase proficiency in math for students with disabilities include an

improvement activity delivery system and a driver of that system. Dirigo Star is a guidance tool that uses research to support targets schools select in the development of their improvement plans. Coaching is a model of professional development that leads to improvement in instructional capacity, culture and a focus on content, including the use of data to inform practice (Neufeld & Roper, 2003). Implementation science research provides evidence of the effectiveness of these strategies for improving math outcomes for students with disabilities.

The State Implementation and Scaling-up of Evidence-based Practices Center (SISEP) provides technical assistance to increase knowledge of evidence-based practices available to establish implementation infrastructures in SEAs and SAUs. SISEP describes implementation drivers as "...the critical components of the implementation infrastructure that supports successful and sustainable implementation of evidence based programs, practices and innovations (SISEP eNotes, retrieved 3/4/2015 from <http://sisep.fpg.unc.edu/news/sisep-enotes-june-2012>)" (see Appendix C, Label 1, page 45). It is suggested that, when these drivers are used together there is a substantially greater likelihood that implementation will occur in a timely manner, with high fidelity, and be sustainable. Implementation drivers are seen as comprising the following categories:

- 1) Organization drivers: create and sustain hospitable organizational system environments for effective services;
- 2) Leadership drivers: as different challenges call for different strategies, SISEP suggests using a strategy, or driver, that meets the needs of the challenge;
- 3) Competency drivers: develop, improve, and sustain competent and confident use of innovations.

By using Maine's version of Indistar, Dirigo Star, as the implementation system, we will build on tools already known to Maine educators to inform, coach, sustain, track, and report improvement activities to the leadership teams. Dirigo Star's use of indicators for the development of action plans is supported by evidence (called "Wise Ways") identifying the research behind each indicator. Dirigo Star is currently being used successfully by focus schools and their coaches, including use of supported electronic communication to facilitate face-to-face interactions, and is generating positive feedback on its ease of use. While other improvement activity delivery systems used throughout the country were considered, Dirigo Star is aligned with evidence based practices and has had positive outcomes in Maine. The use of Dirigo Star supports both organization and leadership drivers to support sustained improvement efforts.

School-based leader teams will be tasked with using this evidence based delivery system to identify needs and strengths, develop an action plan based on research based practice that addresses needs, leverages strengths, and can be monitored for successful implementation. SSIP coaches, providing professional development on all aspects of implementation, are an essential support to leadership teams as they engage in the process of identification, development and action.

The coaching component of our improvement strategies serves as a competency driver supporting the development, improvement, and sustainability of newly implemented practices and procedures. Coaching begins immediately after the team implementing the change at the school district level receives training in the improvement process. Coaches will support districts in identifying areas of need, completing action plans addressing those needs, and implementing plans. The use of school improvement coaches for the SiMR will provide schools with the level of support they need to learn new, effective strategies, improve upon current practice, or receive the focused support they need to increase proficiency in math for students with disabilities.

Our strategies build upon current professional development through SPDG goals, including an objective of goal 3: increasing educators' knowledge and instructional usage of the revised Maine Learning Results (including Common Core State Standards in English language arts and math) for children with disabilities is supporting improved IEP goals and services for students with disabilities in a proficiency based educational system. An objective of goal 2: increasing the use of systemic plans to improve LRE rates and performance of students with disabilities addresses the widely held understanding that students who are educated in the general education environment and access the general education curriculum demonstrate higher proficiency on statewide assessments than students who do not access general education. The SPDG professional development frame work supports technical assistance via coaching. Evidence based practice professional development is provided regionally to ensure a broader catchment area with the establishment of regional leader teams as the outcome. The

regional leader teams continue to provide professional development to the SAUs in the region. Each region has a coach to help them work through the goals they have set up for themselves in readiness for implementation. This coaching is face-to-face, on-site, with on-going web-based consultation based on each region's need.

The Maine ESEA waiver (<http://www.maine.gov/doe/accountability/index.html>) describes in detail how focus schools are identified and the process they follow with an assigned School Improvement Specialist as the coach supporting the schools in this process. This process includes, along with the School Improvement Specialist, conducting a self-assessment, analyzing the results and student achievement data, and constructing an improvement plan designed to focus on decreasing within school gaps. The waiver goes on to describe the Dirigo Star platform guiding the assessment, plan development and ongoing monitoring. It explains how long a school stays with the focus school designation and how schools achieve goals on their improvement plans. Support from special education specialists is included in the implementation of the process. Our SSIP strategies have been designed to align with these State practices.

#### **4.C. A description of how implementation of improvement strategies will address identified root causes for low performance and ultimately build capacity to achieve the SiMR for students with disabilities.**

Our decision to use the Dirigo Star tool specifically supports local efforts to identify root causes for low performance in math for students with disabilities. By using tools within Dirigo Star guided by a trained coach, school districts will complete a self-assessment and make data-driven decisions in identifying root causes specific to their schools. Assigned coaches will help design and implement an action plan that includes research based practices designed to address root cause needs. Action plans may include changes in the leadership, school board policies, type and delivery of professional development, and alignment of curriculum with standards, instruction and assessment. Schools will assess, and may also receive coaching to improve instructional practices; inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education setting; equity of access to instruction aligned with standards; compliance of IEPs; screening and progress monitoring; use of differentiated instruction; use of universal design for learning principles; and other interventions. The essence of coaching as a competency driver is to provide embedded support to educators and leader teams and sustained professional development to refine existing skills and acquire new skills designed to effectively address school or district needs. By addressing the individual school causes and challenges, and using data to inform outcomes and planning, the coach and implementation team will use research and knowledge to support adult learning and introduce and sustain practice changes leading to improved learning outcomes.

#### **4.D. A description of how the selection of coherent improvement strategies include strategies identified through Data and State Infrastructure Analysis that are needed to improve the State infrastructure and to support LEA implementation of evidence-based practices which will improve results for students with disabilities.**

Capacity at the SEA level is an identified area of need. With the development of the SSIP, available positions in the Office of Special Services have changed job descriptions and responsibilities to align with the necessary skills of the SSIP coaches. These include special educators with expertise in math instruction, coaching, and inclusive practices. The School Improvement Team employs as coaches educators and education leaders who have retired from field work and are engaged in coaching schools with gaps in performance. The Office of Special Services will mirror this model to obtain the staff capacity needed to implement the SSIP. Educators and education leaders in the field with experience in these specific areas will be approached to explore their interest in this new and exciting work.

The root causes pointing to poor proficiency in math for students with special needs are specific to each school. Dirigo Star indicators, supported by research, shape the actions of the school or SAU implementation team to identify the issues and develop a successful plan for improvement. Coaches support the team in implementation and in using data to inform their progress, practice, and changes to the plan.

Maine has drafted a general timeline for the initial implementation of the SSIP. During this time the SSIP workgroup will

continue to collaborate with the School Improvement Team and gather input from our technical assistance centers. Within this general timeline we will develop the coach training program, define the components of school improvement planning tool we will use, and create the application and agreement process for participating schools (see Appendix C, Label 2, page 46).

Maine's plan for scaling up the work of the SSIP includes providing support for schools and SAUs with varying needs. To scale up the practice of the SSIP we expect to offer an opportunity for SAUs state-wide to participate in a self-assessment of their practices impacting math instruction for students with disabilities. The intensity of support needed at any identified school or SAU will vary depending on the outcomes of the self-assessment. Universal supports would be provided to all districts with resources always available through technology. Targeted supports would occur based on a process of identification and self-assessment. When identified, intensive intervention would be specific and tailored to the needs of individual SAUs.

Maine DOE is currently taking steps towards a plan for integrating a tiered process into yearly public school monitoring of special education programs. Maine DOE has a staff person and team dedicated to the development of a tiered monitoring system. Initial steps include commitment to participation in a cross state learning collaborative around tiered support processes being facilitated by the National Center for Systemic Improvement. The tiered system of support for schools seeking or needing assistance improving proficiency in math for their students with disabilities can align with already existing plans for a tiered monitoring system in Maine.

#### **4.E. A description of stakeholder involvement in the selection of coherent improvement strategies.**

At the September 23, 2014 stakeholders meeting the members prioritized areas of need that would be addressed by the selected improvement strategies (see Appendix A, Label 4, page 33). These included having a leadership team committed to an improvement plan and supporting a collaborative climate for general and special educators to provide equitable math instruction for students with disabilities. Leadership would also support well mapped math curricula across districts aligned with instruction, assessment and state standards, improved teacher use of evidence-based instructional practices, increased professional development in the area of math instruction, and improved inclusion practices for students with disabilities.

The group arrived at consensus on coaching as a primary improvement strategy. It was decided that, by establishing building level leadership teams using evidence based practices currently accessed by Maine DOE initiatives (e.g., Dirigo Star), those teams will lead to effective professional development structures, well mapped math curriculum with effective instruction that is aligned with assessment, and a collaborative climate for teacher planning, student planning, and student programming. Barriers at the time were identified as a lack of clarity on how exactly coaching would be established and implemented. The road map for scaling up was not yet defined. However, it was also recognized that coaching is being successfully used in several well aligned initiatives. Rather than "barriers", these might be better defined as "concerns that need to be addressed".

Since that time, the SSIP workgroup working with the TA providers from the National Center for Systemic Improvement (NCSI) and the IDEA Data Center, and with our OSEP State Contact have identified how barriers will be overcome and what a scale-up model would be for the SSIP. This information was shared with stakeholders through written contact in February 2015. Stakeholder response was positive, with comments such as "The proposal is exciting and should make a significant difference to the students.... I believe it will also benefit students in other schools that can learn from the results of the project".